



Alaska's new assessments in English and Math

Alaska will test students in English and math in grades 3 through 10 in the spring, as it has done since 2005. But there are some improvements under the Alaska Measures of Progress (AMP) tests.

Students will take two tests instead of three, with fewer questions overall. Schools can break up each test into sections and give students just one section a day.

As before, the tests are untimed. Most students will spend four to five hours a year on the tests.

As before, students with disabilities may be eligible for accommodations. Students with severe cognitive disabilities may be eligible to take an alternate test.

The benefits of computer-based tests

Students will take the Alaska Measures of Progress on a computer. *Using computers, students are actively engaged in the test.*

In math problems, students might drag and drop items, put items in order, or plot points on a graph. In answering an English question, students might highlight text.

The computer's tools include ways to help students focus during the test. For example, all students can use highlighter, striker, eraser, tags, guidance, search, and calculators (for parts of the test), and hear directions through headphones.

Students who have a documented need can use calming music or larger text, cover irrelevant text, and (for math) hear the text on headphones.

Students who experience disabilities or who are English language learners may use tools geared to their needs.

We have created technology practice tests so students will learn how to use the computer to answer test questions. See education.alaska.gov/akassessments/

Tools are available for teachers

The Alaska Measures of Progress offer schools free optional tools to check whether students are on track while instruction is taking place. Classroom tests on specific learning goals have 8-10 questions. Teachers receive results immediately for each student. Starting in fall 2016, teachers can use computer-based assessments to check twice a year on students' progress and see results quickly.

AMP is not high stakes

The Alaska Measures of Progress are not pass/fail tests. Students' scores will place them in one of four levels of performance: Level 1, 2, 3, and 4, from low to high. Level 3 represents meeting the standards. But Level 1 and Level 2 do not represent failure by students or teachers.

The Alaska Measures of Progress are not high-stakes tests. The only consequence for students who score low on an AMP test should be to receive support to improve their learning.

AMP test scores do not affect graduation, classroom grades, grade promotion, or college admissions.

Why give standardized tests?

Increasingly, Americans need more than a high school diploma to earn a living wage. Our students need a foundation of academic skills so that as adults they have the flexibility to compete in a shifting economy.

The Alaska Measures of Progress assess students in this goal: ***Students are on the path to graduate with the English and math skills to succeed in the workplace, training, or education of their choice.***

Only Alaska's standardized tests measure this goal, and they do so in a fair way. Everyone is tested on the same topics, and everyone's test is scored in the same way.

Classroom tests and course grades from teachers do not provide that information.

Unlike classroom tests and course grades, standardized tests provide data over time using a stable measure.

Parents and teachers will receive AMP reports that break down their students' test scores into subcategories of skills. Parents also can see how their students compare with other students.

Standardized tests:

... allow teachers to review their classroom's performance in particular skills in English and math, to help shape instruction the following year.

... allow teachers to review the prior English and math performance of their incoming students.

... allow principals to review students' performance by grade level in specific skills in English and math.

... allow superintendents to review district and school performance for the student body as a whole and in subgroups of ethnicity, income, and disability.

... allow districts and the state to review whether improvement is needed, using a measure that treats districts equally.

... are based on the premise that all students deserve an equal opportunity to meet high expectations.

... provide comparative information to parents who are considering a choice of schools.

Standardized tests do not measure everything that is valuable in a student's education. That is not their purpose.

We test students in English and math because those skills are important in daily life, the workplace, K-12 schools, and training and education after high school.

Standardized tests add to, but do not replace, other sources of information. AMP scores are just one source of information to help parents and educators decide whether students need more support in learning English and math.

Other sources are homework, classroom and district assessments, and parents' and teachers' observations. Together, parents and teachers look at the whole student. Students cannot be reduced to a test score, yet tests have their place in assessing students' needs.

AMP scores are a piece of school accountability to the public. AMP scores help the public -- as parents, voters, and taxpayers -- understand how their local schools are performing in foundational skills and whether they are improving over time.